

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received AUG 8 1986

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic

and/or common Downtown Monroe Historic District

2. Location

street & number roughly bounded by the Ouachita River, Interstate 20, N/A not for publication
Catalpa Street, and Jefferson Street

city, town Monroe N/A vicinity of

state LA code 22 county Ouachita Parish code 073

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	N/A being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name MULTIPLE OWNERSHIP

street & number

city, town _____ vicinity of _____ state _____

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Ouachita Parish Courthouse

street & number 300 St. John Street P. O. Box 1862

city, town Monroe state LA 71201

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title LA Historic Sites Survey has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ no

date 1986 ☐ federal ☒ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records LA State Historic Preservation Office

city, town Baton Rouge state LA

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date <u>N/A</u>

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Monroe Historic District boundaries encompass fifty-seven commercial and institutional buildings located adjacent to the Ouachita River. Except for two buildings, contributing elements date from the period 1890 to 1936. The district retains its historic character despite some demolition and a 35% intrusion rate.

The present city of Monroe traces its origins to Fort Miro and its associated Spanish post. The post was established in the 1780's, and the fort was built in 1790. In 1811 former Spanish commandant Don Juan Filhiol donated a three hundred foot square to serve as the courthouse site. The only building thought to date from anywhere near this early period is the old Clerk of Court's Office (#24). It was apparently built in 1816, although this is difficult to verify from architectural evidence.

In 1820 Monroe was granted a charter as a town, and in 1871 it was incorporated as a city. During these years it became a processing and shipping center for cotton and cotton products. The town grew and developed around the courthouse square. The previously mentioned Clerk of Court's Office and the Isaiah Garrett Law Office (1840-#20-National Register) are the only remaining pre-1890 buildings in the district.

Continued economic activity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was undoubtedly a significant factor in changing the Monroe townscape. In addition to the continuing importance of cotton to the local economy, a statewide lumber boom during the period had a tremendous impact. For example, the 1913 Sanborn Insurance Company map collection devotes only one sheet to the central business district and five sheets to lumber yards. Of course, the Ouachita River and both a north-south and east-west railroad were crucial to this late nineteenth-early twentieth century prosperity. One can see this prosperity in the district's building stock, particularly in the pretentious row of 1890's Italianate commercial buildings along Grand Street (#s 1, 2, and 4-9). Overall, the period of lumber boom preeminence (c.1890-c.1920) accounts for some 33% of the district's building stock.

During these years Monroe certainly exhibited a healthy architectural conservatism. For example, one still sees full-blown Italianate commercial buildings constructed as late as 1913 (#s 31 and 32). The original Ouachita National Bank Building (1906, #33) is also somewhat backward looking. Despite its colossal temple front, it has overly vertical proportions redolent of the Victorian Renaissance Revival. One can make a similar observation regarding St. Matthew's Catholic Church (#53). Perhaps the district's most striking building, it has a mid-Victorian "muscular" Gothic style which would have been thought very old fashioned in 1899 when it was built.

Additional development in Monroe was spurred by the discovery of the Monroe Gas Field in 1916. By the mid-1920's the field was regarded as the "world's greatest gas field," and its impact on the city was considerable. Thirty-five percent of the district's buildings date from the historic gas boom era. Some of these are major landmarks reflecting at least in a general sense the prosperity of the period. Three are Chicago style skyscrapers with neo-classical details (#s 15, 34 and 38), and one is an extremely elaborate Modernistic skyscraper (#51). Other landmarks from the period include the Ouachita Parish Courthouse (#19), the Federal Courthouse (#54), the Ouachita Parish High School (#21-National Register), and the Central Savings Bank (#50). Although these are not skyscrapers, they are all relatively

CONTINUED

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Monroe Historic District

Item number 7

Page 1

7. Description Ouachita Parish, LA
(cont'd)

large buildings, and each is a strong stylistic statement. Overall, most of the district's 1920's and '30's landmarks are in a fairly severe neo-classical style, although the Modernistic and Jacobean Revival styles are also represented.

Style - Period Breakdown

Pre-Civil War	4%	2
1890-1910	23%	13
1911-1920	10%	5
1921-1936	28%	17
Intrusions	35%	20

The Monroe district has a somewhat open character for an urban area. By examining Sanborn maps of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one sees that the district was once more tightly packed. In the 1950's and '60's there was a good deal of demolition to provide for additional parking. Of course, this demolition also reflected the fact that, with suburbanization, many of the older buildings downtown had fallen into disuse. Despite this, the district retains its cohesiveness because it is composed of large buildings which relate to each other even from a long way off. In addition, the district is usually seen as a single entity because it is cut off from the surrounding city either by large blocks of modern buildings or Interstate 20. Finally, the Monroe district retains its cohesive singular identity because of its scale. Whereas most of present-day Monroe is characterized by one to two story strip development, the district is marked by six major structures which range in height from six to eleven stories. These mark the district off from the rest of the city and give it a separate identity.

Contributing Elements

The Monroe Historic District is significant as a superior example of a late nineteenth-early twentieth century townscape (i.e., up to 1936). There are certain elements (see Item 8) which give it this superior status, but the district should also be viewed as a tout ensemble of its period. Other 50+ year old elements which do not directly contribute to the district's superiority are important because they lend cohesiveness to the overall building mix. They also help establish the general historic flavor of the area. Hence any 50+ year old structure which has not been altered beyond recognition is considered a contributing element for purposes of this application.

Integrity of Contributing Elements:

Apart from three special cases and the loss of historic shopfronts, Monroe's contributing elements remain largely intact. Of course, some of the district's commercial buildings have been "slipcovered" and are listed as non-contributing elements. The most notable loss of historic shopfronts, in varying degrees, occurs in the party wall strip along the west side of Grand Street. Most of these are Italianate buildings, and despite the loss of their shopfronts, they still retain

CONTINUED

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Monroe Historic District

Item number 7

Page 2

Ouachita Parish, LA

Description (cont'd)

the principal elements of the style (pressed metal or brick decorative cornices, segmentally arched windows, cast-iron hood molds, ornamental parapets, etc.). Also, it should be noted that virtually every other old central business district in the region has a similar problem. As far as the State Historic Preservation Office is aware, no town in northeastern Louisiana retains a significant complement of historic shopfronts.

The aforementioned special cases are the old Clerk of Court's Office (#24), the courthouse (#19), and an Italianate commercial building (#32). Although the Clerk of Court's Office was stuccoed over in the twentieth century, its original form, massing and architectural identity remain. It is still easily recognizable as an early nineteenth century small office structure. The neo-classical courthouse received two symmetrical wing additions in the 1960's. But this has not affected its character within the district. The additions duplicated the building's neo-classical styling so well that even a trained observer cannot tell that they are not original. Building #32 has lost its Italianate parapet, but it still retains copious brick detailing in many other places. Moreover, because it is the only instance of a loss of this kind, its effect upon the district is minimal.

Intrusions:

Although the district's 35% intrusion rate is relatively high, it is certainly not without precedent in Louisiana Register districts. (There are four Register districts in the state with an intrusion rate of over 30%, with the highest being 36%.) In any event, percentage figures alone should not be the determining factor, but rather the size and character of the intrusions and how well the area is able to absorb them and retain its historic character. Roughly 80% of Monroe's intrusions are only one story high, and most are remodeled older buildings; hence they do not significantly disturb the streetscape. Very importantly, the intrusions in virtually every case are easily overwhelmed by the much larger and visually stronger historic buildings. The general view photographs accompanying this submission are more telling than percentage figures in demonstrating that the Monroe district retains its historic character. (See particularly General Views 15, 17, 18, and 19.)

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet Monroe Historic District

Item number 7

Page 3

Ouachita Parish, LA

MONROE HISTORIC DISTRICT INVENTORY

1. Contributing element. c.1890 two story brick Italianate commercial building with polychromy effects, segmental parapet, and completely original cast-iron shopfront.
2. Contributing element. J. S. Bloch Building (Ferd-Levi Building). National Register. 1893 two story brick Italianate commercial building with shallow arch fenestration, brick pilasters, a corner entrance, a parapet formed of molded brick panels, and elaborate cast-iron shopfront.
3. Contributing element. c.1900 one story small brick storage building (deteriorated).
4. Contributing element. 1890 two story stuccoed Italianate commercial building. Stucco worked into rockface stone pattern with piers and vousoirs. Original windows replaced with stained glass and modern awning added.
5. Contributing element. 1891 two story brick Italianate bank building. Elaborate parapet consists of corbel table, blind arcade, three paneled tablets, and a crowning central gable. Modern replaced shopfront.
6. Contributing element. c.1893 two story stuccoed Italianate commercial building with shallow arch fenestration, cast-iron window caps with gables, and pressed metal modillion cornice. Everything at shopfront level replaced except for cast-iron columns.
7. Contributing element. Same as #6.
8. Contributing element. Same as #6.
9. Contributing element. c.1893 two story stuccoed Italianate commercial building with cast-iron window caps and pressed metal modillion cornice. Everything at shopfront level replaced except for cast-iron columns.
10. Contributing element. c.1925 one story relatively plain stuccoed neo-classical commercial building with cartouches and Greek key cornice. Shopfront level completely replaced.
11. Contributing element. c.1925 plain two story brick commercial building; altered shopfront.
12. Contributing element. c.1925 relatively plain one story brick commercial building with pediment shaped parapet. Altered shopfront.
13. Non-contributing element. Two story parking garage.
14. Non-contributing element. Small modern service station.

CONTINUED

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Monroe Historic District

Item number 7

Page 4

Ouachita Parish, LA

MONROE HISTORIC DISTRICT INVENTORY (CONTINUED)

15. Contributing element. c.1925 nine story Chicago style brick commercial building. Diapered brick. Upper story set in cement bands like a frieze.
16. Contributing element. 1903 three story Italianate stuccoed commercial building with shallow arch fenestration, pressed metal cornice, and central gable parapet.
17. Contributing element. 1903 two story brick Italianate commercial building with shallow arch fenestration. Shopfront altered, although some of cast-iron columns remain.
18. Non-contributing element. c.1950 small one story buff brick commercial building.
19. Contributing element. 1924 four story neo-classical parish courthouse with limestone facing. Features impressive colossal columnar piano nobile. c.1950 wings styled to resemble existing building.
20. Contributing element. Isaiah Garrett Law Office. 1840 one story brick plain residence historically used as a law office. National Register.
21. Contributing element. 1924-1930 Ouachita Parish High School. Three story neo-Jacobean brick building with Flemish gable parapets and cast cement trim (N.R.).
22. Non-contributing element. 1940's-'50's two story brick commercial building.
23. Contributing element. 1927 three story brick and limestone courthouse annex done in a low-key Italian Renaissance palazzo style. Has rear extension in same style and one story modern side wing (south) designed to be in keeping.
24. Contributing element. Believed to have been built in 1816, although difficult to verify from architectural evidence. One story clerk of court's office with gable parapet. Original brick surface stuccoed in twentieth century.
25. Non-contributing element. c.1910 two story brick building converted to garage facility c.1940 with "modernistic" front.
26. Non-contributing element. 1983 two story stuccoed school.
27. Non-contributing element. Four story brick school; designed 1934, completed 1944.
28. Contributing element. 1911 two story handsome pedimented neo-Palladian brick church with dome. (First Baptist Church)

CONTINUED

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet Monroe Historic District
Ouachita Parish, LA

Item number 7

Page 5

MONROE HISTORIC DISTRICT INVENTORY (CONTINUED)

29. Contributing element. c.1935 six story neo-classical brick office building with free-standing columns on top floor and arched windows on second floor.
30. Non-contributing element. c.1960 small one story office building.
31. Contributing element. c.1913 three story brick Italianate commercial building with arched windows and elaborate shaped parapet. Shopfront replaced.
32. Contributing element. c.1913 three story brick Italianate commercial building with triple arched windows on second story and original cast-iron columns at shopfront level. Parapet removed.
33. Contributing element. Original Ouachita National Bank. 1906; Drago & Smith, Architects. Neo-classical limestone temple with composite order fluted columns. Pediment features dentils and modillions and is crowned by an anthemion.
34. Contributing element. c.1920 eleven story brick and limestone bank with neo-classical ornamentation, including colossal Doric articulation of the nine and tenth stories and pilasters on the ground story. (Ouachita National Bank)
- 35-37 Non-contributing elements. One story older commercial buildings that have completely new fronts.
38. Contributing element. Ouachita National Bank Building. c.1925 eight story brick neo-classical office building with a cornice ornamented with dentils, modillions and anthemions; upper story set in frieze; low-key Chicago style.
39. Contributing element. c.1930 two story neo-classical brick commercial building with cast concrete garlands and swags in entablature and swan neck pedimented door.
40. Non-contributing element. One story older commercial building with completely new front.
41. Non-contributing element. Same as #40.
42. Contributing element. 1914 & 1916. Two story brick neo-classical commercial building featuring engaged columns.
43. Contributing element. c.1925 six story brick neo-classical commercial building with terra-cotta sheathing. Decorative elements include pilasters, reeded panels, medallions, anthemions above cornice, and a Vetruvian scroll.
- 44-48. Non-contributing elements. One story older commercial buildings with completely new fronts.

CONTINUED

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet Monroe Historic District
Ouachita Parish, LA

Item number 7

Page 6

MONROE HISTORIC DISTRICT INVENTORY (CONTINUED)

49. Non-contributing element. c.1940 one story low-key modernistic commercial building with replaced shopfront.
50. Contributing element. Central Savings Bank & Trust Co. 1920's two story neo-classical bank featuring portico with papyrus capitals on columns and pilasters. Side elevation articulated with same pilasters.
51. Contributing element. Francis Hotel. 1934 eleven story brick and terra-cotta Modernistic skyscraper with stylized classical motifs in spandrel panels, vertical shafts between windows, and rooftop finials. Building also features an elaborately articulated two-stage water tower.
52. Contributing element. Rectory for St. Matthews Catholic Church. c.1935 two story brick vaguely Gothic residence.
53. Contributing element. St. Matthews Catholic Church. 1899 brick Gothic church with frontal tower and contrasting light terra-cotta trim. Its massiveness is reminiscent of the mid-Victorian Gothic Revival.
54. Contributing element. United States Courthouse and Post Office. 1932 three story Modernistic courthouse with post office space on ground story. Features marble facing, fluted window slits, and elaborate stylized bas relief.
55. Non-contributing element. c.1950 two story brick vaguely Modernistic commercial building.
56. Contributing element. c.1930 plain one story brick commercial building.
57. Contributing element. c.1930 plain two story brick commercial building.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1816–1936

Builder/Architect N/A

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph) Criterion C

The Monroe Historic District is locally significant in the area of architecture as the finest historic central business district in northeastern Louisiana. This region includes the parishes of Union, Lincoln, Jackson, Ouachita, Caldwell, Morehouse, Richland, Franklin, East Carroll, West Carroll, and Madison.

Monroe has traditionally been regarded as the economic capital of northeastern Louisiana. Of the 230 towns in the area, about twenty have historic central business districts, and of these, Monroe's is easily the finest. Monroe's architectural superiority is based upon two primary considerations: the commercial Italianate style and architectural landmarks.

No commercial buildings remain in the region from the Greek Revival period. The earliest commercial buildings one sees are in the Italianate style. Only a handful of towns retain Italianate commercial buildings, and in those which do, one generally finds one or two isolated, low-key examples. By contrast, Monroe has twelve examples (21% of the building stock), some of which are very elaborate. In addition, the district features an impressive more or less continuous row of eight Italianate buildings which constitutes the only wholly Victorian commercial streetscape remaining in the region.

The Monroe district is a regional "mecca" of late nineteenth-early twentieth century eclectic architecture, containing eight examples which are either on the Register or considered to be eligible on a regional basis by the State Historic Preservation Office. These are the Ouachita Parish High School (#21-N.R.), St. Matthew's Catholic Church (#53), the 1906 Ouachita National Bank Building (#33), the Ouachita Parish Courthouse (#19), the Central Savings Building (#50), the Francis Hotel (#51), the Federal Courthouse and Post Office (#54), and the First Baptist Church (#28). In addition, the district has three Chicago style skyscrapers, the region's only examples.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Sanborn Insurance Company Maps, Monroe, 1886, 1890, 1893, 1898, 1903, 1909, 1913.
Brasseaux, Carl A., Conrad, Glenn R., and Robison, R. Warren. The Courthouses of Louisiana.
Lafayette, Louisiana: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1977.
Franks, Kenny A. and Lambert, Paul F. Early Louisiana and Arkansas Oil. Texas A & M

University Press, 1982.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property @ 48 acres

Quadrangle name Monroe North and Monroe South, LA

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A 1 5 5 8 3 0 8 0 3 5 9 6 5 0 0
Zone Easting Northing

B 1 5 5 8 3 3 2 0 3 5 9 5 8 2 0
Zone Easting Northing

C 1 5 5 8 3 1 0 0 3 5 9 5 5 4 0

D 1 5 5 8 2 8 0 0 3 5 9 6 2 8 0

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification

See enclosed map for description and continuation sheet for justification.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title National Register Staff

Assisted by James E. Green, Monroe
Planning & Urban Development Dept.

organization Division of Historic Preservation
State of Louisiana

date June 1936

street & number P. O. Box 44247

telephone 504-922-0358

city or town Baton Rouge

state LA 70804

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

___ national ___ state X local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Robert B. DeBlieux
Robert B. DeBlieux

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date August 1, 1986

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

John A. Byrne
Keener of the National Register

date 9-4-86

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet Monroe Historic District

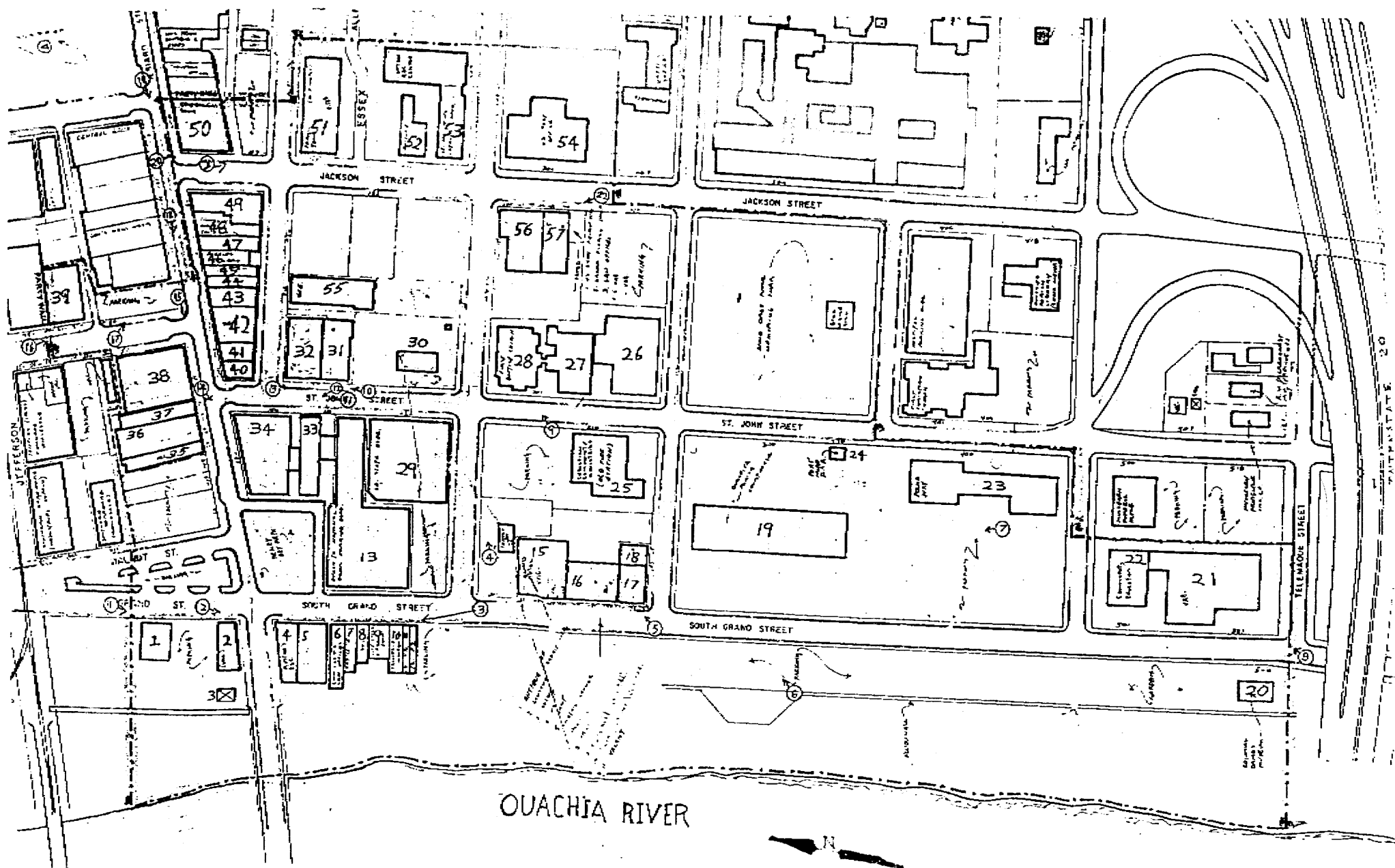
Item number 10

Page 1

Ouachita Parish, LA

Boundary Justification:

In most instances the district boundaries are clear, obvious, and easy to delineate. The western boundary follows the Ouachita River. The southern boundary abuts Interstate 20, and beyond the Interstate is a nondescript residential area. The undulating eastern boundary is determined in large part by large low-scale modern buildings located along St. John, Jackson, and Catalpa Streets (see map). East of the district on Desiard Street is an area of older buildings, virtually all of which have been altered beyond recognition. The northern boundary abuts an area of severely altered older buildings. The boundary line is irregular in order to take in building #39 (see map). Although it may look somewhat awkward on the map, Building 39 forms a continuous urban space with Buildings 33, 42, and 43. Photo #16 shows an urban vista which is a distinctive part of the district's character.



No 50 = CENTRAL BANK
 300 DESIARD STREET
 MONROE, LA. 71211

MONROE HISTORIC DISTRICT

